

CLAIMS

1. A processor switchable between a first
execution mode and a second execution mode, the
5 processor having a first processor context when in the
first execution mode and a second processor context,
different from the first processor context, when in the
second execution mode, wherein the processor is
arranged to generate an exception when the processor
10 attempts to change from one execution mode to the
other.

2. A processor according to claim 1 wherein the
second processor context is larger than the first
15 processor context and the exception is generated when
the processor attempts to change from the first
execution mode to the second execution mode.

3. A processor according to claim 2, wherein the
20 processor is arranged to preserve the second processor
context, or that part of the second processor context
which is different from the first processor context,
when said exception has been generated.

4. A processor according to claim 2, wherein the
25 processor is arranged to execute a plurality of threads
on a time share basis, and the processor is arranged
such that, when the processor is switched to a thread
which is in the first execution mode, or when the
30 processor is switched to a thread which was the last
thread to be in the second execution mode, only the
first processor context is preserved.

5. A processor according to claim 4, wherein the
35 second processor context, or that part of the second
processor context which is different from the first

processor context, is preserved when the processor next enters the second execution mode to execute a thread other than the last thread to be in the second execution mode.

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6. A processor according to claim 2, wherein the processor is arranged to execute a plurality of threads on a time share basis, and the number of threads that may be in the second execution mode at any one time is less than the total number of threads that may be active on the processor at any one time.

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7. A processor according to claim 6, wherein the processor is arranged such that, when said exception has been generated, a check is carried out to determine whether the thread that caused the exception is allowed to enter the second execution mode.

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8. A processor according to claim 7, wherein the check comprises determining whether that thread is a thread which is barred from the second execution mode.

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9. A processor according to claim 7, wherein the check comprises determining whether a predetermined number of other threads are already in the second execution mode.

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10. A processor according to claim 9, wherein the processor is arranged such that, if a predetermined number of other threads are already in the second execution mode, execution of the thread that caused the exception is suspended until the number of other threads that are in the second execution mode is less than the predetermined number.

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11. A processor according to claim 1, wherein the

processor is arranged to execute a first instruction set when in the first execution mode and a second instruction set when in the second execution mode.

5 12. A processor according to claim 1, wherein the processor is switchable between a supervisor mode and a user mode, the user mode having restricted access to the processor's resources in comparison to the supervisor mode, and, when said exception is generated, 10 the processor transfers from the user mode to the supervisor mode.

15 13. A processor according to claim 1, the processor comprising at least one execution unit and a plurality of storage locations, the first processor context comprising the contents of storage locations accessible in the first execution mode and the second processor context comprising the contents of storage 20 locations accessible in the second execution mode.

25 14. A processor according to claim 1, the processor comprising a plurality of computational units for executing instructions in parallel, each computational unit having at least one execution unit and at least one storage location to which the 30 execution unit has access.

35 15. A processor according to claim 1, wherein the first execution mode is a scalar mode and the second execution mode is a parallel mode.

 16. A processor switchable between a first execution mode and a second execution mode, the processor having a first processor context when in the 35 first execution mode and a second processor context, larger than the first processor context, when in the

second execution mode, wherein the processor is arranged to execute a plurality of threads on a time share basis, and the processor is arranged such that, when the processor switches to a thread which is in the first execution mode, or when the processor switches to a thread which was the last thread to be in the second execution mode, only the first processor context is preserved.

17. A processor according to claim 16, wherein the second processor context, or that part of the second processor context which is different from the first processor context, is preserved when the processor next enters the second execution mode to execute another thread.

18. A processor according to claim 16, wherein the processor is arranged such that the number of threads that may be in the second execution mode at any one time is less than the total number of threads that may be active on the processor at any one time.

19. A processor according to claim 16, wherein the first execution mode is a scalar mode and the second execution mode is a parallel mode.

20. A processor switchable between a first execution mode and a second execution mode, the processor having a first processor context when in the first execution mode and a second processor context, larger than the first processor context, when in the second execution mode, wherein the processor is arranged to execute a plurality of threads on a time share basis, and the processor is arranged such that the number of threads that may be in the second execution mode at any one time is less than the total

number of threads that may be active on the processor at any one time.

21. A processor according to claim 20 wherein the processor is arranged such that, when a thread attempts to enter the second execution mode, a check is carried out to determine whether that thread is allowed to enter the second execution mode.

22. A processor according to claim 21, wherein the check comprises determining whether that thread is a thread which is barred from the second execution mode.

23. A processor according to claim 21, wherein the check comprises determining whether a predetermined number of other threads are already in the second execution mode.

24. A processor according to claim 23, wherein the processor is arranged such that, if a predetermined number of other threads are already in the second execution mode, the thread that attempted to enter the second execution mode is prevented from entering the second execution mode until the number of other threads that are in the second execution mode is less than the predetermined number.

25. A method of operating a processor, the processor being switchable between a first execution mode and a second execution mode and having a first processor context when in the first execution mode and a second processor context, different from the first processor context, when in the second execution mode, the method comprising generating an exception when the processor attempts to change from one execution mode to

the other.

26. A method of operating a processor, the processor being switchable between a first execution mode and a second execution mode and having a first processor context when in the first execution mode and a second processor context, larger than the first processor context, when in the second execution mode, the method comprising executing a plurality of threads on a time share basis, and preserving only the first processor context when execution switches to a thread which is in the first execution mode, or when execution switches to a thread which was the last thread to be in the second execution mode.

27. A method of operating a processor, the processor being switchable between a first execution mode and a second execution mode and having a first processor context when in the first execution mode and a second processor context, larger than the first processor context, when in the second execution mode, the method comprising executing a plurality of threads on a time share basis and limiting the number of threads that may be in the second execution mode at any one time to less than the total number of threads that may be active on the processor at any one time.

28. A computer readable storage medium having stored thereon an operating system for a processor which is switchable between a first execution mode and a second execution mode and which has a first processor context when in the first execution mode and a second processor context, different from the first processor context, when in the second execution mode, the operating system comprising an exception handling program portion for handling an exception generated

when the processor attempts to change from one execution mode to the other.

29. A computer readable storage medium having
5 stored thereon an operating system for a processor
which is switchable between a first execution mode and
a second execution mode and which has a first processor
context when in the first execution mode and a second
processor context, larger than the first processor
10 context, when in the second execution mode, the
operating system comprising a program portion for
switching execution between a plurality of threads on a
time share basis, and a program portion for preserving
only the first processor context when execution
15 switches to a thread which is in the first execution
mode, or when execution switches to a thread which was
the last thread to be in the second execution mode.

30. A computer readable storage medium having
20 stored thereon an operating system for a processor
which is switchable between a first execution mode and
a second execution mode and which has a first processor
context when in the first execution mode and a second
processor context, larger than the first processor
25 context, when in the second execution mode, the
operating system comprising a program portion for
switching execution between a plurality of threads on a
time share basis, and a program portion for limiting
the number of threads that may be in the second
30 execution mode at any one time to less than the total
number of threads that may be active on the processor
at any one time.